



Succession stories in the citrus industry

The Danckwerts family of Saxfold Farm, Adelaide

Jock Danckwerts explains that Saxfold is a small family business and currently has 80 ha under production. "In the broader scheme of things we are not big farmers and are like many other farmers throughout SA. This farm is a piece of paradise, but it has taken generations of farming to create and generally we like to keep a low profile. I am also involved in a bigger corporate business, which is separate from our family farm. J&B Citrus at Cookhouse has 400 ha of citrus, and I am one of three shareholders. My partners and I started this business from scratch.

"My grandfather first planted citrus in 1904. So, technically my association with the citrus industry goes way back," explains Jock. "However, up to 1990, when I returned to the family farm, which was at the time almost an insolvent business, our farming enterprise consisted mostly of stock farming with a little citrus. From that time onwards, I concentrated on the citrus enterprise and have been a citrus farmer ever since, both on my home farm at Adelaide and in the Fish River Valley."

Jock is extremely pragmatic about the risks of farming and involving other members of the family in the farming enterprise. Both he and Richard established and worked within careers outside of the farming business, which they could return to if necessary, in order to mitigate this risk.

The Danckwerts and Cross families have been in the Adelaide district of the Eastern Cape Midlands for six generations since the 1850s. Jock and Sandy Danckwerts have been farming at Saxfold for many years and their eldest son Richard, who represents the seventh generation, joined the family farming business in 2016. Originally compiled by Louise Brodie, journalist.

"Realistically, farming is a risky business, as some years are disastrous and one needs to make provision for the bad years. One of the biggest challenges for a small family

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farming business is bringing in a second family who is funded from the income of the farm into the business, while maintaining the family lifestyle. If you want to absorb the next generation into the farming business, you have to have an outside income, or build up your farming business to the point that the income can support two families.

"Most farms fail in the turnover of the generations and the main causes of this are that farms are divided to the point that the remaining units are no longer economically viable, or one of the sons inherits the land but has to pay his siblings out the equivalent of their share of the farm value. This debt load often cripples the farmer financially. The

sad story is that in the handover process the family business is not big enough to maintain the family and that causes its failure. The family invariably sells their land and the result of this has been the growth of corporate farming businesses," explained Jock.

"So, if your farm is not big enough to split between your children for each to receive an economically sustainable unit, my advice is that you should sell your farm and give the children the money. Otherwise, if you are going to leave the farm to one of your children, make sure that you do not put a millstone of indebtedness around that child's neck. Make sure that your children have a good education so that they can make a living for themselves, which does not rely on the farm."

Besides farming, Jock has also established a career as an academic and university lecturer. He has also been involved in organised agriculture in the South African citrus industry since the deregulation in the 1990s, and was part of the team who facilitated the establishment of Citrus





The team at Saxfold Farm, from left to right: Jock Danckwerts with his dog Toto, farm manager Leon Pagel, farm manager Mervin Judge, administration officer Lisa Judge, Joy Danckwerts, Sandy Danckwerts and Richard Danckwerts

Research International (CRI). Jock received his doctorate in Grassland Science from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and following this, he established himself as an academic in this field. He has published over 100 papers and is an internationally recognised expert on range and pasture. He was with the Department of Agriculture for 15 years and held the positions of Team Leader for Pasture Research in the Eastern Cape, as well as Deputy Director for research in the Free State Region. Subsequently, he held the positions of Professor of Plant Sciences and Dean of Research at the University of Fort Hare, as well as Scientific and Research Advisor to the Range and Forage Institute of the ARC (Agricultural Research Council). He has also served on the board of Katco Citrus co-operative in Fort Beaufort and, in recognition of his contribution to the South African citrus industry, in 2015 the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) chose Jock as a Citrus Legend.

"When I joined the family business, finances were tight and I needed to

maintain a second job to provide a second income. I was the day-to-day hands-on manager on the farm and also established my consultancy business, which I still run today. As the farm developed, we reached the point that it had become too big for me to be a part-time farmer and also do my consulting business and the Cookhouse business. This created space for Richard to join the business and the sums worked," explained Jock.

Richard is a professional land surveyor and qualified at the University of Cape Town. He is in his early 30s and, prior to joining the farm, he worked as a land surveyor in Grahamstown for five years. "I became a land surveyor so that I could farm and potentially run a second business if I need to," explains Richard. "Initially when I joined the farm I continued doing this part-time. But farming was taking up too much of my time, so I have stopped my land surveying

for now. However, I maintain the points required for this profession and if I needed to commence with it again to supplement our income, I could do so in the future."

Richard and his wife Joy have been married for three years and live on Saxfold Farm. Earlier this year Joy gave birth to a baby boy Samuel, who will be the eighth generation of the family to live at Saxfold. Richard is in charge of farming operations. Sandy Danckwerts commented that it has been good for Richard and Joy to join the family business, as it has brought renewed energy to the farm. Jock agrees and added: "During the last four years Richard has done more development on this property than we did during the previous 10 years and this has doubled the value of the farm. This is what the energy of youth brings to a family business."

Richard is the eldest of Jock and Sandy's three children. Lindsay is the second eldest

and is 29. She has completed Business Science at the University of Cape Town and has worked in the fruit business for Zest Fruit export industry. Lindsay is currently doing her Master's degree on the Water Economic Footprint of Citrus in the Eastern Cape. The youngest is Matthew, who is 24 and studying at the University of Stellenbosch, hoping to complete his Master's degree on Fire Behaviour focusing on veld fires, which ties in with Jock's field of expertise.

"We have embraced the necessity to transform and this is represented throughout our management and staff," explains Richard. "We have two farm managers, Mervin and Leon. Mervin Judge and his wife Lisa are coloured and are central to our management, as he is one of our managers and his wife does our administration. Our other manager, Leon Pagel, is strictly speaking disabled as he lost a leg in an accident. But despite this, he is very mobile

and is an excellent manager." Richard added that the rest of the Saxfold staff are black or coloured. They have on-going skills development training including AgriSETA Learnerships. This is done during working

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hours and the time spent on this amounts to around one month of the year. "The training opportunities that we have given our people have assisted them to empower themselves.

Saxfold does not form part of a state scheme water allocation system and with

their own proactive water management systems, they have sufficient water for their current orchards and to expand into the future. Considering Jock's extensive career in this field and his consultancy business, which incorporates wildfire investigation, the commitment to environmental sustainability and environmental stewardship is a fundamental ethic and central to farming practices at Saxfold. When Jock comments, "I wrote the book on environmental sustainability," this is in fact no exaggeration!

Richard is doing lots of long-term investment and both he and Jock are concerned about the future. "Besides the economic uncertainty of farming, the current political uncertainty is also worrying as this makes it difficult to plan for the future. While it does not stop us from developing, having a second career to fall back on remains extremely important," concluded Jock. 



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